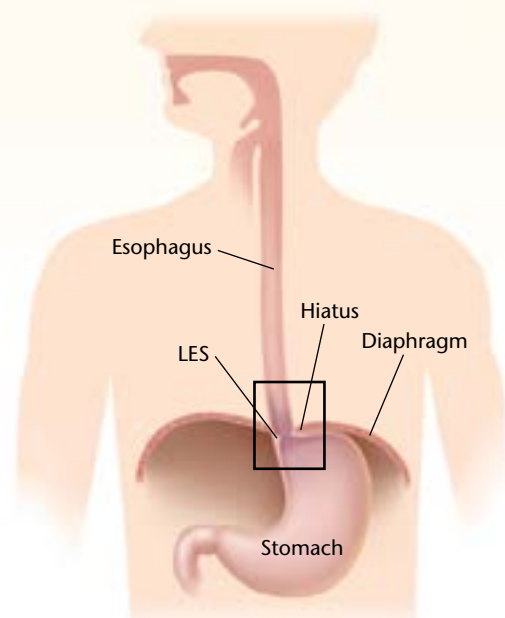
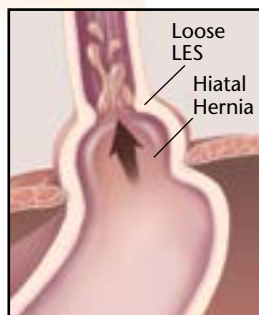


Where the esophagus and stomach connect

The esophagus is a muscular tube that links the throat to the stomach. At the bottom of the esophagus is the **lower esophageal sphincter (LES)**. The LES acts as a valve. It passes through an opening (**hiatus**) in the **diaphragm**. The diaphragm is a sheet of muscle between the chest and abdomen.



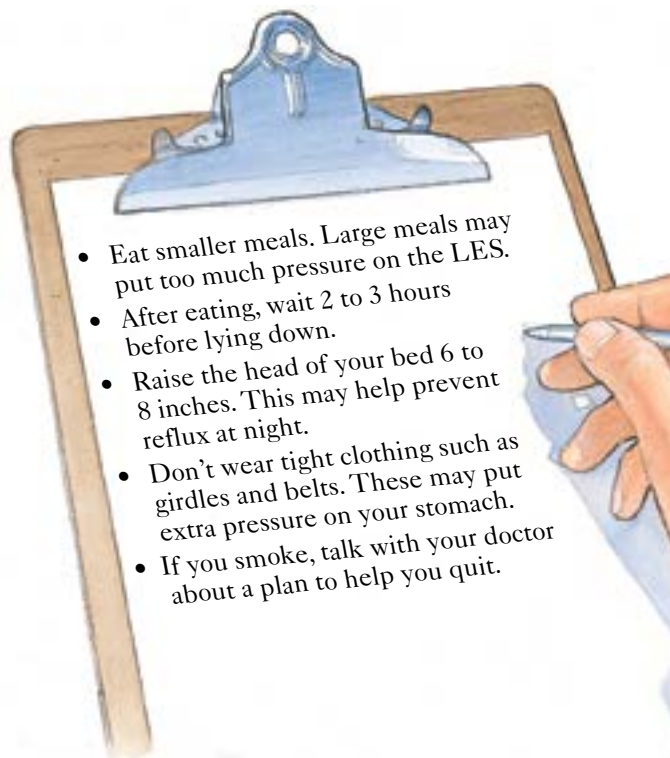
Normally when you eat, food moves down the esophagus. The LES then relaxes to allow food to pass into the stomach. It tightens again to keep food and digestive acids down in the stomach.



If the hiatus is too wide, part of the stomach may bulge above the diaphragm. This bulge is called a **hernia**. If the LES is not tight, stomach acid may move up into the esophagus (**reflux**).

More tips for relief

There is more you can do to help relieve hiatal hernia symptoms. Try the tips below.



- Eat smaller meals. Large meals may put too much pressure on the LES.
- After eating, wait 2 to 3 hours before lying down.
- Raise the head of your bed 6 to 8 inches. This may help prevent reflux at night.
- Don't wear tight clothing such as girdles and belts. These may put extra pressure on your stomach.
- If you smoke, talk with your doctor about a plan to help you quit.

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Hiatal Hernia

Understanding a common problem



Should you be concerned?

You may be surprised to learn you have a hiatal hernia. This common problem occurs when the stomach bulges up into the chest. A hiatal hernia isn't like a hernia in the groin. Most people with a hiatal hernia have no symptoms and need no treatment. If symptoms do occur, they can often be easily managed.

What you may feel

Most people with a hiatal hernia don't have symptoms. But if acid flows up from your stomach (reflux), you may have:

- Heartburn or other chest discomfort
- A lot of burping
- Sour or acid taste in your mouth
- Problems swallowing
- Nighttime coughing or wheezing



Discovering a hiatal hernia

Often, a hiatal hernia is found during an exam or tests for another health problem. An evaluation for hiatal hernia is usually needed only if symptoms bother you. A health history, physical exam, and tests may be done. These help ensure that your symptoms aren't caused by a heart condition or other problem.



Tests you may have

Tests may include:

- Imaging tests such as an **upper GI barium X-ray** or a **CT scan** may show a hiatal hernia.
- **Endoscopy** may be done to let your healthcare provider look directly into your esophagus.
- **Esophageal manometry** or a **24-hour acid (pH) monitoring test** may be done to check for reflux or other problems that can cause similar symptoms.

Treating your symptoms

If you have symptoms from a hiatal hernia, the goal is to help you feel better. These suggestions may help:



Lose excess weight. Excess weight puts pressure on the stomach and esophagus. Losing weight may help relieve symptoms.

Watch what you eat. Certain foods or drinks may trigger symptoms in some people. Examples include fatty or spicy foods, alcohol, chocolate, and caffeine. If certain foods or drinks affect you, it may be best not to have them.

Try acid-reducing medicines. Over-the-counter antacids may relieve heartburn. Talk to your healthcare provider about what over-the-counter or prescription medicines may help you.

Keep in mind that surgery is rarely needed. It's typically used only for severe, uncontrolled symptoms. During the surgery, the stomach is moved back below the diaphragm. The opening in the diaphragm is then tightened.